THE LONE WOLF

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

CHAPTER XXX—Continued.

—14—

For the present, however, Lanyard wasn't taking any. He met that challenge with a look of blank noncomprehension, folded his arms, lounged against the desk, and watched Mme. Omber acknowledge, none too cordially, the sergent's query.

"I am Mme. Omber—yes. What can I do for you?"

The sergent gaped.

"Pardon!" he stammered, then laughed as one who tardily appreciates a joke. "It is well we are here in time, madame," he added—"though it would seem you have not had great trouble with this miscreant. Where is the woman?"

He moved a pace toward Lanyard—handcuffs jingled in his grasp.

"A moment, if you please!" madame interposed. "Woman? What woman?"

Pausing, the sergent explained in a tone of surprise:

"His accomplice, naturally! Such were our instructions—to proceed at once to madame's home, enter quietly by way of the servants' entrance—which would be open—and arrest a burglar with his female accomplice."

Again the stout sergent moved toward Lanyard; again Mme. Omber stopped him.

"One moment, if you please!"

Her eyes, dense with mystification and suspicion, questioned Lanyard's, who, with a significant nod toward the jewel case still in her hands, gave her a look of dumb entreaty.

After brief hesitation, "It is a mistake," madame declared; "there is no woman in this house that I know of who has no right to be here. But you say you received a message? I sent none!"

The fat sergent shrugged. "That is not for me to dispute, madame. I have only my information to go by."

He glared sullenly at Lanyard, who returned a placid smile which, despite what little hope was to be derived from madame's irresolute manner, masked a vast amount of trepidation. He felt tolerably sure Mme. Omber had not summoned the police on prior knowledge of his presence in the library. This meant, then, a new form of attack on the part of the Pack. He must certainly have been followed—or else the girl had been caught attempting to steal away and the information extracted from her by force majeure. Moreover, he could hear two more pairs of feet tramping through the salons.

Pending the introduction of these last, Mme. Omber said nothing more.

And, unceremoniously enough, the newcomers shouldered their way into the library—two men in citizen's clothing—one pompous body of otherwise undistinguished appearance, promptly identified by the sergents de ville as the commissaire of that quarter, the other, a puffy mediocrity, known to Lanyard at least (if no one else seemed to recognize him) as Popinot.

At this confirmation of his darkest fears the adventurer abandoned hope of any aid from Mme. Omber and began to take unostentatious stock of his chances of escaping by his own efforts.

But he was altogether unarmed, thanks to his precipitate action in drawing the teeth of madame's revolver, and the odds were heavy—four against one, all four no doubt under arms, and two at least—the sergents de ville—men of sound military training.

"Mme. Omber?" inquired the commissaire, saluting that lady with immense dignity. "One trusts that this intrusion may be pardoned, the circumstances remembered. In an affair of this nature, involving this repository of so historic treasures—"

"That is quite well understood, monsieur le commissaire," madame replied distantly. "And this monsieur is, no doubt, your aid?"

"Pardon!" Monsieur le commissaire hastened to make his companion known. "M. Popinot, agent de la surete, who lays these informations."

With a profound obeisance to Mme. Omber, Popinot strode dramatically over to face Lanyard and explore his lineaments with his small, keen, shifty eyes of a pig—a scrutiny which the adventurer suffered with superficial imperturbability.

"It is he!" Popinot announced with a gesture. "Messieurs, I call upon you to arrest this man, M. Michael Lanyard, self-styled the Lone Wolf."

He stepped back a pace, expanding his chest in a vain effort to eclipse his abdomen, and glanced round triumphantly at his respectful auditors.

"Accused," he added with intense relish, "of the murder of Inspector Roddy of Scotland Yard at Troyon's, and of setting fire to that establishment—"

"For this, Popinot," Lanyard interrupted in an undertone, "I shall some time cut off your ears!" He turned to Mme. Omber: "Accept, if you please, madame, my sincere regrets—but this accusation happens to be one of which I am altogether innocent."

Instantly, from his passive pose, Lanyard straightened up, and the heavy brass and mahogany humidor whereon his right hand had been resting seemed fairly to leap from its place on the desk as, with a sweep of his arm, he sent it spinning point-blank at the younger sergent.

Before that one, wholly unprepared, could more than gasp, it caught him a blow like a kick just below the breastbone. He reeled, and the breath left him in one mighty gust; he sat down abruptly—blue eyes wide with a look of aggrieved surprise—clapped both hands to his middle, blinked, turned pale, and keeled over on his side.

But Lanyard hadn't waited to note results. He was too busy. The fat sergent, with a snarl, had leaped upon his arm and was struggling to hold it still long enough to snap a handcuff round the wrist, while the commissaire had started with a bellow of rage and two hands extended, itching, for the adventurer's throat.

The first received a half-arm jab on the point of his chin that jarred his teeth, and without in the least understanding how it happened, found himself being whirled around and laid prostrate in the commissaire's path. The latter tripped, fell and planted two hard knees, with the bulk of his weight atop them, on the zenith of the sergent's rotundity.

At the same time Lanyard, leaping toward the doorway, noticed that Popinot was tugging at a revolver in his hip pocket.

Followed a vivid flash, then complete darkness; with a well-aimed kick—an elementary movement of la savate—Lanyard had dislodged the light switch, knocking its porcelain box from the wall, thus breaking the connection and causing a short circuit which extinguished every light in the house.

With his way thus apparently cleared, the police in confusion, darkness abetting him, Lanyard plunged on; but in midstride, as he crossed the threshold, his ankle was caught and jerked from under him by the still prostrate younger sergent.

For the next minute or two Lanyard fought blindly, madly, viciously, striking and kicking at random.

Then, free, he made off, running, stumbling, reeling, gained the reception hall, flung open the door, and heedless of the picket who had fired at him from below the window, threw himself bodily down the steps and away.

Three shots sped him through that intricate tangle of the night-bound park. But all flew wide; and the pursuit—what little there was—blundered off at haphazard and lost itself.

He came to the wall, crept along in shelter of its deeper shadow until he found a tree with a low-swung branch that jutted out over the street, climbed this, edged outward, and dropped to the sidewalk.

A shout from the direction of the nearest gate greeted his appearance. He turned and dashed off. Running feet for a time pursued him, and once he heard the rumble of a motor. But he recovered quickly, regained his wind, and ran well, with long, steady, ground-consuming strides, and doubled, turned, and twisted in a manner to wake the envy of the most subtle fox.

The pursuit failed once more. In time he felt warranted in slowing down to a rapid walk.

Weariness was now a heavy burden upon him, and his spirit numbed with desperate desire for rest; but his pace did not flag nor his purpose falter from its goal.

It was a long walk to which he set himself and, as soon as he felt confident of freedom from espionage, a direct one. He plodded without faltering to the one place where he could

Lanyard Fought Blindly, Madly, Viciously.

feel sure of finding his beloved, if she lived and were free. He knew that she had not forgotten, and in his heart he knew that she would never again of her own will fail him.

Nor had she, when—weary and spent from that heart-breaking climb up the merciless acclivity of the Butte Montmartre—he staggered rather than walked past the sleepy verger and found his way through the crowding shadows to the softly luminous heart of the cathedral of the Sacre-Coeur, and found her kneeling, her head bent upon hands resting across the back of the little chair before her, a slight and timid figure lost and lonely in the long ranks of empty chairs that filled the body of the nave.

Slowly, almost fearfully, he went to her, and silently slipped into the chair by her side.

She knew, without looking up, that it was he.

After a little her hand stole out to his, closed round his fingers and drew him forward with a gentle, insistent pressure. He knelt then with her, hand in hand—filled with the wonder of it, that he to whom religion had been nothing should have been brought to this by the magic of a woman's love.

He knelt for a long time, for many minutes, his somber gaze questioning the golden shadows and the ancient mystery of the farther choir and distant shining altar—and there was no more doubt in his heart but that, whatever should ensue of this, the restless spirit of the Lone Wolf was laid at last.

But in time he remembered how urgent was their plight; and remembering, found courage to break in upon her devotions.

"We must go," he said gently. "We haven't much time, and we must be out of Paris before dawn if we're to live to see another sundown. I think that will be all right—I've a standing arrangement with the minister of war."

She rose quietly, with a serenely radiant face.

"I knew you would be here," he said slowly—"I knew it well."

"I knew you would come here for me," she told him in turn—"I knew you must. I was praying that you might be spared to me, my dearest."

CHAPTER XXXI.

Wings of the Morning.

About half past six Lanyard left the dressing room assigned him in the barracks at Port Aviation and, waddling quaintly in the heavy wind-proof garments provided at the instance of Ducroy, made his way between two hangars to the practice field.

Now the eastern skies were pulsing fitfully with promise of dawn; but within the vast inclosure of the aerodome the gloom of night lingered so stubbornly that two huge searchlights had been pressed into the service of those engaged in tuning up the motor of the Parrott biplane.

In their intense, white, concentrated glare—that rippled oddly upon the wrinkled, oily garments of the dozen or so mechanics busy about the machine—the under sides of those wide, motionless planes hung against the dark with an effect of impermanence—as though they were already afloat and needed but a breath to send them winging skyward.

At one side a number of young and keen-faced Frenchmen, officers of the corps, were lounging, overlooking the preparations with alert and intelligent interest.

On the other, all the majesty of Mars was incarnate in the rotund person of M. Ducroy, posing valiantly in furlined coat and shining top-hat while he chatted with an officer of tall, athletic figure who wore an air of uncommon efficiency together with his aviating uniform.

As Lanyard drew near, this man brought his heels together smartly, saluted the minister of war and strode off toward the flying machine.

"Captain Vauquelin informs me he will be ready to start in five minutes, monsieur," Ducroy announced. "You are just in time."

"And mademoiselle?" the adventurer asked, peering anxiously around.

Almost immediately the girl came forward from the shadows with a smile apologetic for the strangeness of her attire.

She had donned, over her street dress, a simple leather garment which enveloped her completely and buttoned tight round wrists and ankles. Her small hat, too, had been replaced by a leather helmet-cap which left only her eyes, nose, mouth and chin exposed, and even these were soon to be hidden by a heavy veil for protection against spattering oil.

"Mademoiselle is not nervous—eh?" Ducroy inquired politely.

Lucy smiled brightly.

"I? Why should I be, monsieur?"

"I trust mademoiselle will permit me to commend her courage. Pardon! I have one last word for the ear of Captain Vauquelin."

Lifting his hat, the Frenchman joined the group near the machine.

Lanyard stared unaffectedly at the girl's face, unable to disguise his wonder at the high spirits advertised by her rekindled color and brilliant eyes.

"Well?" she demanded gayly. "Don't tell me I don't look like a fright! I know I do!"

"I daren't tell you how you look to me," Lanyard replied soberly. "But I will say this, that for sheer, downright pluck, you—"

"Thank you, monsieur! And you?"

He glanced with a deprecatory smile at the flimsy-looking contrivance to which they were presently to intrust their lives.

"Somehow," said he doubtfully, "I don't feel in the least upset or exhilarated. It seems little out of the average run of life—all in the day's work!"

"I think," she replied, "that you're very like the other lone wolf, the fictitious one—Lupin, you know—a bit of a humbug. If you're not nervous, why keep staring hither and yon—as if you were rather expecting somebody—as if you wouldn't be surprised to see Popinot or De Morbihan pop out of the ground—or Ekstrom!"

"Hum!" he said gravely, "I don't mind telling you now, that's precisely what I am afraid of."

"Nonsense!" the girl cried in open contempt. "What could they do?"

"Please don't ask me," Lanyard begged seriously. "I might try to tell you."

"But don't worry, please!" Fugitively her hand touched his arm. "We're ready."

It was true enough. Ducroy was moving toward them again.

"All is prepared!" he announced in sonorous accents.

In a sober silence they approached the machine.

Vauquelin kept himself aloof while Lanyard and a young officer helped the girl to a seat on the right of the pilot's and strapped her in. When the adventurer had been similarly secured in the place on the left the two sat, imprisoned, some six feet above the ground.

Lanyard found his perch comfortable enough. A broad band of webbing furnished support for his back, another crossed his chest by way of provision against forward pitching, there were rests for his feet and cloth-wound grips fixed to struts on either side for his hands.

He smiled at Lucy across the empty seat, and was surprised at the clearness with which her answering smile was visible. But he wasn't to see it again for a long and weary time; almost immediately she began to adjust her veil.

The morning had grown much lighter within the last few minutes.

A wait ensued of seemingly interminable duration. A swarm of mechanics, assistants and military aviators buzzed round their feet like bees.

The sky was now pale to the eastern horizon. A fleet of heavy clouds was drifting off into the south, leaving in their wake thin veil of mist that bade fair soon to disappear before the rays of the sun. The atmosphere seemed tolerably clear and not unseasonably cold.

The light grew stronger still—features of distant objects defined themselves; traces of color warmed the winter landscape.

After some time their pilot, wearing his wind-mask, appeared and began to climb to his perch. With a cool nod for Lanyard and a civil bow to his woman passenger he settled himself, adjusted several levers and flirted a gay hand to his brother officers.

There was a warning cry from the rear. The crowd dropped back rapidly to either side. Ducroy lifted his hat in parting salute, cried "Bon voyage!" and scuttled clear like a startled rooster before a motor car. Thereupon the motor and propeller broke loose with a mighty roar comparable only, in Lanyard's fancy, to the chant of ten thousand riveting-locusts.

He felt momentarily as if his tympanums must burst with the incessant and tremendous concussion registered upon them; but presently this sensation passed, leaving him with that of permanent deafness.

Before he could recover and regain control of his startled wits the aviator had grasped a lever and the great fabric was in motion.

It swept down the field like a frightened swan, and the wheels of its chassis, registering every infinitesimal irregularity in the surface of the ground, magnified them all a hundredfold. It was like riding in a tumbrel driven at top speed over the Giant's Causeway. Lanyard was shaken violently to the very marrow of his bones; he believed that even his eyes must be rattling in their sockets.

Then the Parrott began to ascend. Singularly enough, this change was marked at first by no more than a slight lessening of the vibration—the machine seemed still to be dashing over a cobbled thoroughfare at breakneck speed; and Lanyard found it difficult to appreciate that they were afloat, even when he looked down and discovered a hundred feet of space between himself and the practice-field.

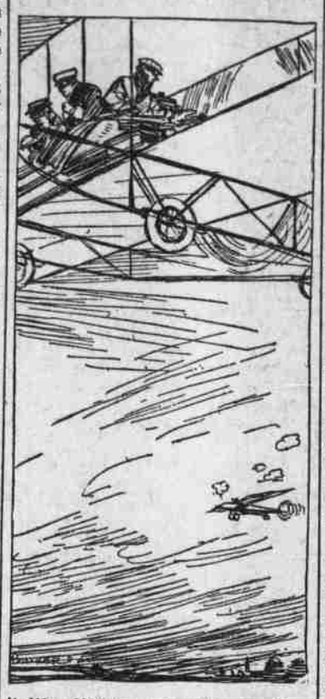
In another breath they were soaring over housetops.

Momentarily, now, the shocks became less frequent. And presently they ceased almost altogether, to be repeated only at rare intervals, when the drift of air opposing the planes developed irregularities in its velocity. There succeeded, in contrast, the sublimest peace; even the roaring of the propeller dwindled to the negligible status of a sustained drone; the Parrott seemed to float without an effort upon a vast, still sea, flawed only occasionally by inconsiderable ripples.

Still rising, they surprised the earliest rays of the sun; and in their virgin light the aeroplane was transformed into a thing of gossamer gold.

Continually the air buffeted their faces like a flood of icy water.

Below, the scroll of the world unrolled like some vast and intricately



It Was Nothing Less Than De Morbihan's Valkyr Monoplane.

illuminated missal, or like some strange mosaic, marvelously minute.

Lanyard could see the dial of the compass, fixed to a strut on the pilot's left. By that telltale their course lay nearly due northeast. Already the weltering roofs of Paris were in sight to the right, the Eiffel tower soaring from them like a fairy pillar of fine gold lace-work, the Seine looping the cluttered acres like a sleek brown snake.

Versailles broke the horizon to port and slipped astern. Paris closed up, telescoped its panorama, became a mere blur, a smoky smudge.

But it was long before the distance eclipsed that admonitory finger of the Eiffel.

Vauquelin manipulating the levers, the plane tilted its nose and swam higher and yet higher. The song of the motor dropped an octave to a richer tone. The speed was sensibly increased.

Lanyard contemplated with untempered wonder the fact of his equanimity—there seemed nothing at all strange in this extraordinary experience; he was by no means excited, remained merely deeply interested. And he could detect in his physical sensations no trace of that qualmish dread he had always associated with high places—the sense he now experienced of security, of solidity, ever afterward remained wholly unaccountable in his understanding.

Of a sudden, surprised by a touch on his arm, he turned to meet through the mica windows of the wind-mask the eyes of the aviator, informed with an expression of importunate doubt, quite illegible. Assailed by sickening fear lest something was going wrong with the machine, Lanyard shook his head to indicate want of comprehension. Then, with an impatient gesture, the aviator pointed downward.

Appreciating the fact that speech was impossible, Lanyard clutched the struts and bent forward. But the pace was now so fast and their elevation so great that the landscape swimming beneath his vision was no more than a brownish plain fugitively maculated with blots of contrasting color.

He looked up blankly, but only to be treated to the same gesture.

Piqued, he concentrated attention more closely upon the flat, streaming landscape. And suddenly he recognized something oddly familiar in the bend of the Seine that was approaching.

"St.-Germain-en-Laye!" he exclaimed with a start of alarm.

This was the danger point.

"And over there," he reminded himself—"to the left—that wide field with a queer white thing in the middle that looks like a winged grub—that must be De Morbihan's aerodome and his Valkyr monoplane! Are they bringing it out? Is that what Vauquelin means? And if so—what of it? I don't see."

A sudden doubt and wonder chilled the adventurer.

Temporarily, Vauquelin returned entire attention to the management of the biplane. The wind was now blowing more fitfully, creating pockets—those "holes in the air" so dreaded by cloud-pilots—and in quest of a more constant resistance the aviator was swinging his craft in a wide northerly curve, climbing ever higher and more high.

The earth soon lost all semblance of design; even the twisted silver wire of the Seine vanished far on the left; remained only the effect of firm suspension in that high, blue vault, of a continuous flow of iced water on the face, together with the tuneless chant of the motor.

After some forty minutes more of this—it may have been an hour, for time was then an incalculable thing—Lanyard, in a mood of abnormal sensitiveness, began to divine some little disquiet in the mind of the aviator, and stared until he caught his eye.

"What is it?" he screamed to the other in futile effort to lift his voice above the din.

But the Frenchman understood, and responded with a sweep of his arm toward the horizon ahead. And seeing nothing but cloud in the quarter indicated, Lanyard began to grasp the nature of a phenomenon which, from the first, had been vaguely troubling him. The reason why he had been able to perceive no real rim to the world was that the earth was all asteam from the heavy rains of the last week; all the more remote distances were veiled with rising vapor. And now they were approaching the coast, to which, it seemed, the mists clung closest; for all the world before them slept beneath a blanket of dark gray.

Nor was it difficult now to understand why the aviator was ill at ease facing the prospect of navigating in a channel fog.

Several minutes later he startled Lanyard with another peremptory touch on his arm, followed by a significant glance over his shoulder.

Lanyard turned hastily.

Behind them, at a distance which he calculated roughly as two miles, the silhouette of a monoplane hung against the brilliant firmament, resembling, a solitary, soaring gull than any man with its single spread of wings, more directed mechanism.

Only an infrequent and almost imperceptible shifting of the wings proved that it was moving.

He watched it for several seconds, in deepening perplexity finding it impossible to guess whether the monoplane were gaining or losing in that long chase or who might be its pilot.

Yet Lanyard entertained little doubt that the pursuing machine had risen from the aerodome of Count Remy de Morbihan at St.-Germain-en-Laye; that it was nothing less, in fact, than De Morbihan's Valkyr monoplane, reputed the fastest in Europe and winner of a dozen international events; and that it was guided, if not by De Morbihan himself, by one of the creatures of the Pack—quite possibly, even more probably, by Ekstrom!

But—assuming all this—what evil could such pursuit portend? In what conceivable manner could the following pilot reckon to profit himself by overtaking or distancing the Parrott? He couldn't hinder the escape of Lanyard and Lucy Shannon to England in any way, by any means reasonably to be imagined.

Was this simply one more move to keep Lanyard under espionage? But that might more readily have been accomplished by telegraphing or telephoning the Pack's confreres, Wertheimer's associates in the English capital!

What else could the Pack have in mind?

Lanyard gave it up, admitting his inability to trump up any sane excuse for such conduct; but the riddle continued to fret his mind.

From the first, from that moment when Lucy's disappearance had required postponement of this flight, he had apprehended trouble; it hadn't seemed reasonable to hope that the Parrott could be held in waiting on his orders for many days without the secret leaking out; but it was trouble to develop before the start from Port Aviation that he had anticipated. The possibility that the Pack would be able to work any mischief to him after that had never entered his calculations. Even now he found it difficult to give it serious consideration.

Again he glanced back. Now, in his judgment, the monoplane loomed larger than before against the glowing sky, indicating that it was overtaking them.

Beneath his breath Lanyard swore from a heart brimming with disquiet.

The Parrott was capable of a speed of eighty miles an hour; and unquestionably Vauquelin was wheedling every ounce of power out of that willing motor. Since drawing Lanyard's attention to the pursuer he had contrived an appreciable acceleration.

But would even that pace serve to hold the Valkyr in its place, if not to distance it?

His next backward look reckoned the monoplane no nearer.

And another thirty minutes or so elapsed without the relative positions of the two flying machines undergoing any perceptible change.

In the course of this period the Parrott rose to an altitude, indicated by the barograph at Lanyard's elbow, of over half a mile. Below the channel fog spread itself out like a sea of milk, slowly churning.

Staring down in fascination, Lanyard told himself gravely:

"Blue water below that, my friend!"

It seemed difficult to credit the fact that they had covered the distance from Paris in so short a period of time.

By his reckoning—a very crude one—the Parrott was then somewhere off Dieppe—it ought to pick up England, in such case, not far from Brighton. If one could only see!

By bending forward a little and staring past the aviator Lanyard could catch a glimpse of Lucy Shannon.

Though all her beauty and grace of person were lost in the clumsy swaddlings of her makeshift costume, she seemed to be resting comfortably in her place; and the rushing air, keen with the chill of that great altitude, not only molded her wind-veil precisely to the exquisite contours of her face, but stung her firm cheeks until they glowed with a rare fire that even that thick, dark mesh enshrouding them could not wholly quench.

The sun crept above the floor of mist, played upon it with iridescent rays, shot it through and through with a warm, pulsating glow like that of a fire-opal, and suddenly turned it to a sea of fairy gold that, extending to the horizon, baffled every effort to surmise their position, whether they were above land or sea.

None the less, Lanyard's rough and rapid calculations persuaded him that they were then about mid-channel.

He had no more than arrived at this conclusion when a sharp, startled movement that rocked the plane drew his attention to the man at his side.

Glancing in alarm at the aviator's face, he saw that it was as white as marble—what little of it was visible beyond and beneath the wind-mask.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

STRANGE FASHION FREAKS

Women's Styles Follow Stage Fads or National Costumes—Garter Helped One Young Lady.

In nine cases out of ten fashions are born, not made, and they can often be traced to the influence of passing events. It would seem that the short, full skirts which are now in vogue originated with the Russian ballet which has been so popular of late, in the same way as the tight skirts followed the craze for oriental plays and dances. Following up the Russian influence, the Paris fashion experts introduced the Cossack coat and high Cossack boots.

Dress experts keep changing the fashions, as it were, in self-defense. At one time elaborately-worked and hand-embroidered blouses were the vogue. Then machines were so perfected that machine-embroidered blouses outrivaled the hand work, and fashion experts retaliated by designing blouses as plain as they could be made.

The fashion for uncurled feathers was the result of a wet day. Curled ostrich feathers were on every hat, when, at some fashionable function, the rain descended in torrents and every feather was soon absolutely straight. Milliners, always alert for an idea, were struck with the appearance of these feathers, and uncurled ostrich plumes became the demand.

The fashion for wearing ribbons intermingled with curls piled on the top of the head originated in the reign of Louis XIV of France. A certain Mlle. Fontange was out hunting with the king and court, when a branch of a tree caught her hair and pulled it down. With quick resourcefulness, she leaned down, pulled off her ribbon garter, and twisted up her hair with it. The king, noticing the pretty effect, complimented her on her charming coiffure, and from that moment the "fontange," as it was termed, became the rage.

It cannot be denied that most of the more extreme fashions originate with the stage, but the most lasting fashions are due to royalty. The vogue for black and white, which has not yet died out, was the result of the death of King Edward.

Drought Affects Ostrich Feathers.

Largely because of the great drought in Africa, the supply of ostrich feathers is smaller in quantity and inferior in grade.

Tearful Note.

The Texas onion crop will be 187,220 bushels short of the 1915 crop, though there has been an increase of 12 per cent in acreage, according to the estimate of the department of agriculture just made public here. The department predicts that the state will produce 1,935,972 bushels this year, about 55 per cent of normal. The total acreage of the state in 1915 was 8,943 and this year is 10,057.

Somehow the average boy lacks a mania for acquiring good-conduct marks at school.

No, Jane, it isn't the bad eggs that produce tough chickens.

If a girl in love becomes thinner it is a case of "loved and lost."